

The Question of Finance

by Watchman Nee

Faith is the first essential in any work for God, and without it, there can be no truly spiritual work.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-20, Luke 10:7, Acts 20:34, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 9:14, 2 Corinthians 8:15, 2 Corinthians 11:9, Galatians 1:10, Philippians 4:19, 1 Timothy 5:17-18

Topics: "Faith in God", "Financial Independence"

Description

Watchman Nee addresses the critical issue of finance in ministry, emphasizing that the early apostles relied solely on God's provision rather than human support. He argues that true faith in God eliminates financial concerns, allowing workers to focus on their spiritual mission without being influenced by monetary needs. Nee warns against the dangers of seeking financial security from men, which can compromise the spiritual integrity of the work. He encourages a life of faith where workers trust God for their needs, asserting that financial independence from human sources fosters a deeper relationship with God. Ultimately, he calls for a return to the biblical principle of living by faith, where God's servants depend entirely on Him for their sustenance.

Transcript

It is a remarkable fact that, while the book of Acts supplies many minute details regarding the work of an apostle, the one subject which from a human standpoint is of paramount importance in the carrying on of any work is not dealt with at all.

No information whatever is given as to how the needs of the work or the personal needs of the workers were supplied.

This is certainly amazing! What men consider of supreme importance, the apostles regarded of least consequence. In the early days of the Church, God's sent ones went out under the constraint of divine love. Their work was not just their profession, and their faith in God was not intellectual, but spiritual; not just theoretical, but intensely practical. The love and the faithfulness of God were realities to them, and that being so, no question arose in their minds concerning the supply of their temporal needs. Today as then, the matter of finance will present no problems to those who have a vital faith in God and a real love for Him.

This question of finance has most important issues, so let us devote a little time to it. In grace God is the greatest power, but in the world mammon is the greatest. If God's servants do not clearly settle the

question of finance, then they leave a vast number of other questions unsettled too. Once the financial problem is solved, it is amazing how many other problems are automatically solved with it. The attitude of Christian workers to financial matters will be a fairly good indication as to whether or not they have been commissioned of God. If the work is of God, it will be spiritual; and if the work is spiritual, the way of supply will be spiritual. If supplies are not on a spiritual plane, then the work itself will speedily drift on to the plane of secular business. If spirituality does not characterize the financial side of the work, then the spirituality of its other departments is merely theoretical. There is no feature of the work that touches practical issues as truly as its finance. You can be theoretical in any other department, but not in that one.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LIFE OF FAITH

Every worker, no matter what his ministry, must exercise faith for the meeting of all his personal needs and all the needs of his work. In God's Word we read of no worker asking for, or receiving, a salary for his services. Paul made no contract with the church in Ephesus, or with any other church, that he should receive a certain remuneration for a certain period of service. That God's servants should look to human sources for the supply of their needs has no precedent in Scripture.

We do read there of a Balaam who sought to make merchandise of his gift of prophecy, but he is denounced in no uncertain terms. We read also of a Gehazi who sought to make gain of the grace of God, but he was stricken with leprosy for his sin. No servant of God should look to any human agency, whether an individual or a society, for the meeting of his temporal needs. If they can be met by the labor of his own hands, or from a private income, well and good. Otherwise, he should be directly dependent on God alone for their supply, as were the early apostles. The twelve apostles sent out by the Lord had no fixed salary, nor had any of the apostles sent out by the Spirit; they simply looked to the Lord to meet all their requirements. The apostles of today, like those of the early days, should regard no man as their employer, but should trust Him who has sent them forth to bear the responsibility of all that the doing of His will involves, in temporal as well as spiritual matters.

If a man can trust God, let him go out and work for Him; if not, let him stay at home, for he lacks the first qualification for the work. There is an idea prevalent that if a worker has a settled income he can be more at leisure for the work, and consequently will do it better; but as a matter of fact, in spiritual work there is need for an unsettled income, because that necessitates intimate fellowship with God, constant clear revelation of His will, and direct divine support. In worldly business, all a worker needs by way of equipment is will and talent; but human zeal and natural gift are no equipment for spiritual service. Utter dependence on God is necessary if the work is to be according to His will; therefore, God wishes His workers to be cast on Him alone for financial supplies, so that they cannot but walk in close communion with Him and learn to trust Him continually. A settled income does not foster trust in God and fellowship with Him; but utter dependence on Him for the meeting of one's needs certainly does. The more unsettled a worker's living is, the more he will be cast on God; and the more an attitude of trustful dependence on God is cultivated, the more spiritual the work will be. So it is clear that the nature of the work and the source of its supply are closely related. If a worker receives a definite salary from man, the work produced can never be purely divine.

Faith is a most important factor in God's service, for without it there can be no truly spiritual work; but our faith requires training and strengthening, and material needs are a means used in God's hand toward that end. We may profess to have faith in God for a vast variety of intangible things, and we may deceive ourselves into believing we really trust Him when we have no trust at all, simply because there is nothing

concrete to demonstrate our distrust. But when it comes to financial needs, the matter is so practical that the reality of our faith is put to the test at once. If we cannot trust God to supply our temporal needs, then we cannot trust Him to supply our spiritual needs; but if we truly prove His trustworthiness in the very practical realm of material wants, we shall be able also to trust Him when spiritual difficulties arise either in connection with the work or with our personal lives. What a contradiction it is if we proclaim to others that God is the living God, yet we ourselves dare not trust Him for the meeting of our material needs.

Further, he who holds the purse holds authority. If we are supported by men, our work will be controlled by men. It is only to be expected that if we receive an income from a certain source, we should have to account for our doings to such a source. Whenever our trust is in men, our work cannot but be influenced by men. It is a serious misconception to fancy that we can take money from men to do the work of God. If we are supported by men, then we must seek to please men, and it is often impossible at the same time both to please men and God.

In His own work God must have the sole direction. That is why He wishes us to depend on no human source for financial supplies. Many of us have experienced that again and again God has controlled us through money matters. When we have been in the center of His will, supplies have been sure, but as soon as we have been out of vital touch with Him, they have been uncertain. At times we have fancied God would have us do a certain thing, but He has showed us it was not His will by withholding financial supplies. So we have been under the constant direction of the Lord, and such direction is most precious. If we cease to be dependent on Him, how can our trust be developed?

The first question anyone should face who believes himself truly called of God is the financial question. If he cannot look to the Lord alone for the meeting of his daily wants, then he is not qualified to be engaged in His work, for if he is not financially independent of men, the work cannot be independent of men either. If he cannot trust God for the supply of needed funds, can he trust Him in all the problems and difficulties of the work? If we are utterly dependent on God for our supplies, then we are responsible to Him alone for our work, and in that case it need not come under human direction.

May I advise all who are not prepared for the walk of faith, to continue with their secular duties and not engage in spiritual service. Every worker for God must be able to trust Him.

If we have real faith in God, then we have to bear all the responsibility of our own needs and the needs of the work. We must not secretly hope for help from some human source. We must have faith in God alone, not in God plus man. If the brethren show their love, let us thank God, but if they do not, let us thank Him still. It is a shameful thing for a servant of God to have one eye on Him and one eye on man or circumstance. It is unworthy of any Christian worker to profess to trust in God and yet hope for help from other sources. This is sheer unbelief. I have constantly said, and say it again, that as soon as our eyes turn to the brethren, we bring disgrace on our fellow workers and on the name of the Lord. Our living by faith must be absolutely real, and not deteriorate into a "living by charity." We dare to be utterly independent of men in financial matters, because we dare to believe utterly in God; we dare to cast away all hope in them, because we have full confidence in Him.

If our hope is in men, then when their resources dry up, ours will dry up too. We have no board behind us, but we have a Rock beneath us; and no one standing on this Rock will ever be put to shame. Men and circumstances may change, but we shall carry on in a steady course if our reliance is on God. All the silver and the gold are His, and none who walk in His will can ever come to want. We are apt to trust in the

children of the Lord who in bygone days have sent us gifts, but they will all pass away. We must keep our eyes fixed on the unchanging God whose grace and faithfulness continue forever.

The two initial steps in the work of God are--first, the prayer of faith for needed funds, then the actual undertaking of the work. Today, alas! many of God's servants have no faith; yet they seek to serve Him. They undertake the work without having the essential qualification for it; therefore, what they do has no spiritual value. Faith is the first essential in any work for God, and it should be exercised in relation to material as well as other needs. If there is no faith for funds, then no matter how good the work is, sooner or later it will fail. When money stops, the work will stop too.

LIVING FROM THE GOSPEL

Our Lord said, "The worker is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:7); and Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "So also the Lord directed those who announce the gospel to live from the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14). What is the meaning of living from the gospel? It does not mean that God's servant should receive a definite allowance from the church, for the modern system of paid service in the work of God was unknown in Paul's day. What it does mean is that the preachers of the gospel may receive gifts from the brethren; but no stipulations are made in connection with such gifts. No definite period of time is named, no definite sum of money, and no definite responsibility; all is a matter of freewill. As the hearts of believers are touched by God, they give gifts to His servants, so that while these servants receive gifts through men, their trust is still entirely in God. It is upon Him their eyes are fixed, it is to Him their needs are told, and it is He who touches the hearts of His children to give. That is what Paul meant when he spoke of living from the gospel. Paul himself received the gift from the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:16), and when he was in Corinth, he was helped by the brothers in Macedonia (2 Cor. 11:9).

These are examples of living from the gospel. Paul received occasional gifts from individuals and from churches, but he received no definite remuneration for his preaching.

Yes, "the worker is worthy of his wages," and he should certainly live from the gospel. But we do well to ask ourselves, Whose laborers are we? If we are the laborers of men, then let us look to men for our support; but if we are the laborers of God, then we must look to no other but Him, though He may meet our needs through our fellow men. The whole question hinges here: Has God called us and sent us out? If the call and the commission have come from Him, then He must and surely will be responsible for all that our obedience to Him involves. When we make our needs known to Him, He will certainly hear, and He will move the hearts of men to supply us with all we need. If we are only volunteers in God's service, then God will not be responsible for the liabilities we incur, so we shall be unable to live from the gospel.

When Miss M. E. Barber thought of coming to China to serve the Lord, she foresaw the difficulties of a woman setting out on her own for a foreign country, so she asked advice of Mr. Wilkinson of the Mildmay Mission to the Jews, who said, "A foreign country, no promise of support, no backing of any society -- all these present no problem. The question is here: Are you going on your own initiative, or are you being sent by God?" "God is sending me," she replied. "Then no more questions are necessary," he said, "for if God sends you, He must be responsible." Yes, if we go on our own initiative, then distress and shame await us, but if we go as sent ones of God, all responsibility will be His, and we need never inquire how He is going to discharge it.

But in Corinth Paul did not live from the gospel; he made tents with his own hands. So there are evidently two ways by which the needs of God's servants may be met--either they look to God to touch the hearts of

His children to give what is needful, or they earn it by doing part-time secular work. To work with our hands may be very good, but we need to note that Paul does not regard that as the usual thing. It is something exceptional, a course to be resorted to in special circumstances.

"If we have sown to you the spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap from you the fleshly things? If others partake of this right over you, should not rather we? Yet we did not use this right, but we bear all things that we may not cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who labor on the sacred things eat the things of the sacred temple, that those who attend to the altar have their portion with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who announce the gospel to live from the gospel. But I myself have not used any of these things; and I have not written these things that it may be so with me; for it is good for me rather to die than--No one shall make my boast void....What then is my reward?

That in preaching the gospel I may present the gospel without charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the gospel" (1

Cor. 9:11-15, 18). There are certain rights which are the privilege of all preachers of the gospel. Paul did not receive anything from Corinth, because he was in special circumstances at the time; but though he did not avail himself of his privileges as a gospel preacher on that occasion, that he did so at other times is quite clear. "Or did I commit a sin, abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I announced the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages for the ministry to you. And when I was present with you and lacked, I was not a burden to anyone; for the brothers who came from Macedonia filled up my lack, and in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and will keep myself. The truthfulness of Christ is in me, that this boasting shall not be stopped as it regards me in the regions of Achaia" (2 Cor. 11:7-10).

THE PRINCIPLE OF RECEIVING GIFTS

It is not permissible to receive a definite salary from a church, and at times it is not even permissible to receive an indefinite gift. Paul was demonstrating this principle in not receiving anything from the Corinthian church. If anyone gives us a gift out of pity for us, then for the Lord's sake we dare not accept it; or if gifts are offered, the reception of which would either bring us under obligation to the givers, or bring us under their control, we must refuse them too. All the servants of God must not only trust Him entirely for the supply of their needs, but when gifts are freely offered them, they must be able to discern clearly whether or not such gifts could be received by God.

In the Old Testament the tithes of the Israelites were handed over to the Levites. The Israelites made their offerings to God, not to the Levites, but the latter stood in the place of God to receive the offerings. Today we are standing in the position of the Levites, and the gifts that are proffered to us are really offered to God. We do not receive gifts from any man; therefore, we are under obligation to none. If anyone wants thanks, he must seek it from God, for God is the One who receives the offerings. Therefore, whenever a gift is given to us, it is essential for us to be clear whether or not God could receive that gift. If God could not receive it, neither dare we. We dare not accept gifts indiscriminately lest we put God into a false position. (I say this reverently.) There are many people whose lives are not well-pleasing to God; how then could God receive their offerings? If He cannot, then we dare not do so in His stead. We should only receive money when our doing so involves no obligation on our part, and on God's part no misrepresentation of His nature.

It may happen at times that the gift is right, and also the attitude of the giver; but on the strength of his gift the giver may consider himself entitled to a say in the work. It is quite in order for the offerer to specify in what direction his offering be used, but it is not in order for him to decide how the work should be done. No servant of God should sacrifice his liberty to follow the divine leading by accepting any money which puts him under human control. A giver is at perfect liberty to stipulate to what use his gift should be put, but as soon as it is given, he should take hands off, and not seek to utilize it as a means of exercising indirect control over the work. If he can trust a servant of God, let him trust him; if not, then he need not give his money to him.

In secular work the man who supplies the means exercises authority in the realm to which his means are devoted, but not so in spiritual work. All authority in the work rests with the one who has been called of God to do it. In the spiritual realm it is the worker who controls the money, not the money the worker. The one to whom the call has come, and to whom the work has been entrusted by God, is the one to whom God will reveal the way the work must be carried out, and he dare not receive money from anyone who would use his gift to interfere with the Lord's will as it is revealed to him concerning the work. If a giver is spiritual, we shall gladly seek his counsel, but his advice can be sought solely on the ground of his spirituality, not on the ground of his gift. If he can trust us, and if he is clear the Lord is leading him to give it to us, then we may receive his offering; otherwise, let him keep his money, and let us go on with God's work in the way He has directed, looking to Him alone to supply its needs and ours.

In all our service for God we must maintain an attitude of utter dependence on Him. Whether funds are abundant or low, let us steadfastly pursue our work, recognizing it as a trust committed to us by God, and a matter for which we must answer to Him alone. "Am I seeking to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ"

(Gal. 1:10). We must remain absolutely independent of men as regards the financial side of the work, but even in our independence we must preserve an attitude of true humility and willingness to accept advice from every member of the Body who is in close contact with the Head; and we should expect through them confirmation of the leading we have received direct from God. But all the counsel we seek and receive from others is on account of their spirituality, not on account of their financial position. We are willing to seek advice of the richest member of the Body, neither because of nor despite his money, and we are just as ready to seek the counsel of the poorest member, neither because of nor despite his poverty. In matters of finance we must maintain this ground, that it is God alone we have to do with. Let Paul's boasting be ours too!

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GENTILES

The principle is "taking nothing from the Gentiles" (3 John 7). We dare not receive any support for the work of God from those who do not know Him. If God has not accepted a man, He can never accept his money, and only what God can accept dare His servants accept. If anyone engaged in God's service accepts money for the furtherance of the work from an unsaved man, then he virtually places God under obligation to sinners. Let us never receive money on God's behalf which would enable a sinner before the great white throne to charge God with having taken advantage of him. However, this does not mean that we need reject even the hospitality of the Gentiles. If in the providence of God we visit some Miletus, then we should do well to accept the hospitality of a friendly Publius. But this must be definitely under the ordering of God, not as a matter of regular occurrence. Our principle should always be to take nothing from the Gentiles. When we begin to use their money, our work will have fallen into a sorry state.

THE CHURCHES AND THE WORKERS

Should the churches provide for the needs of the workers? God's Word supplies a clear answer to our question. We see there that the money collected by the churches is used in three different ways: (1)For the poor saints. The Scriptures pay much attention to the needy children of God, and a large proportion of the local offerings goes to relieve their distress.

(2)For the elders of the local church. Circumstances may make it necessary for elders to give up their ordinary business in order to devote themselves wholly to the interests of the church, in which case the local brothers should realize their financial responsibility toward them, and seek at least in some measure to make up to them what they have sacrificed for the church's sake (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

(3)For the working brothers and the work. This must be regarded as an offering to God, not as a salary paid to them.

"I robbed other churches, taking wages for the ministry to you. And when I was present with you and lacked, I was not a burden to anyone; for the brothers who came from Macedonia filled up my lack, and in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and will keep myself" (2 Cor. 11:8-9). "And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the account of giving and receiving except you only....But I have received in full all things and abound; I have been filled, receiving from Epaphroditus the things from you, a sweet-smelling savor, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:15, 18).

Where the members of a church are spiritual, they cannot but care for the interests of the Lord in places beyond their own locality, and the love of the Lord will constrain them to give both to the workers and to the work. If the members are unspiritual they will probably reason that, since the church and the work are separate, they have no obligations towards the work, and it is enough that they bear responsibility for the church. But those members who are spiritual will always be alive to their responsibility in regard to the work and the workers, and will never seek to evade it on the ground that they have no official responsibility. They will count it both a duty and a delight to further the Lord's interests by their gifts.

While in the Epistles the churches are encouraged to give to the poor saints and also to the local elders and teachers, there is no mention made of encouraging the giving to the apostles, or to the work in which they were engaged. The reason is obvious. The writers of the Epistles were themselves apostles; therefore, it would not have been fitting for them to invite gifts for themselves or their work, nor had they any liberty from the Lord to do so. It was quite in order for them to encourage the believers to give to others, but for the meeting of their own needs and the needs of the work they could only look to God. As they cared for the needs of others, He did not overlook their needs, and He Himself moved the hearts of His saints to supply all that was required. So the workers of today should do as the apostles did of old, concern themselves only with the needs of others, and God will make all their concerns His.

That was a great and noble statement that our brother Paul made to the Philippians. He dared to say to those who were almost his sole supporters, "I have received in full all things and abound." Paul gave no hint of need, but took the position of a wealthy child of a wealthy Father, and he had no fears that by doing so further supplies would not be forthcoming. It was all very well for apostles to say to an unbeliever who himself was in distress, "Silver and gold I do not possess," but it would never have done for a needy apostle to say that to believers who would be ready to respond to an appeal for help. It is a dishonor to the Lord if any representative of His discloses needs that would provoke pity on the part of others. If we have

a living faith in God, we shall always make our boast in Him, and we shall dare to proclaim under every circumstance, "I have received in full all things and abound." There is nothing petty or mean about God's true servants; they are all great souls. The following lines were penned by Miss M. E. Barber on Psalm 23:5 when she had used her last dollar:

There is always something over,
When we trust our gracious Lord;
Every cup He fills o'erfloweth,
His great rivers all are broad.

Nothing narrow, nothing stinted,
Ever issued from His store;
To His own He gives full measure,
Running over, evermore.

There is always something over,
When we, from the Father's Hand,
Take our portion with thanksgiving,
Praising for the path He planned.
Satisfaction, full and deepening,
Fills the soul, and lights the eye,
When the heart has trusted Jesus
All its need to satisfy.

There is always something over,
When we tell of all His love;
Unplumbed depths still lie beneath us,
Unscaled heights rise far above.
Human lips can never utter
All His wondrous tenderness.
We can only praise and wonder
And His Name for ever bless.

We are the representatives of God in this world, and we are here to prove His faithfulness; therefore, above all in financial matters we must be totally independent of men, and wholly dependent upon God. Our attitude, our words, and our actions must all declare that He alone is our source of supply. If there is any weakness here, He will be robbed of the glory that is His due. As God's servants, we must show forth the abundant resources of our God. We must not be afraid to appear wealthy before people. We must never be untrue, but such an attitude is perfectly consistent with honesty. Let us keep our financial needs secret, even if our secrecy should lead men to conclude that we are well off when we have nothing at all.

He who sees in secret will take note of all our needs, and He will meet them, not in stinted measure, but "according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). We dare to make things difficult for God, because He requires no assistance from us in order to perform His miracles.

From the study of God's Word we note two things concerning the attitude of His children to financial matters. On the one hand, workers should be careful to disclose their needs to none but God; on the other hand, the churches should be faithful in remembering the needs both of the workers and their work, and they should not only send gifts to those who are working in their vicinity, or to those who have been called out from their midst, but, like the Philippians and the Macedonians, they should frequently minister to a far-off Paul. The horizon of the churches should be much wider than it is. The present method of a church supporting its own "minister" or its own missionary was a thing unknown in apostolic days. If, with the present-day facilities for transmitting money to distant parts, the children of God only minister to the material needs of those in their own locality, they certainly lack spiritual insight and largeness of heart. On the part of the workers there must be no expectation from man, and on the part of the churches there should be a faithful remembrance of the work and the workers both at home and abroad. It is essential to the spiritual life of the churches that they take a practical interest in the work. God has no use for an unbelieving worker, nor has He any use for a loveless church.

The distinction between the church and the work must be clearly defined in the mind of the worker, especially as regards financial matters. Should a worker pay a short visit to any place on the invitation of the church, then it is quite right for him to receive their hospitality. But should he stay for an indefinite period, then he must bear the burden alone before God; otherwise, his faith in God will wane. Even should a brother willingly offer free hospitality, it ought to be declined, for the life of faith must be carefully maintained. It is right for the brethren to give occasional gifts to the workers, as the Philippians did to Paul, but they must not bear the responsibility of any. The churches have no official obligations regarding the workers, and the latter must see to it that the former do not take such obligations upon themselves. God permits us to accept gifts, but it is not His will that others become responsible for us. Gifts of love may be sent to the workers from their brethren in the Lord, but no believers must regard themselves as under any legal obligations towards them. Not only have the churches no official responsibility towards the workers; they are not even responsible for their board, lodgings, or traveling expenses. The entire financial responsibility of the work rests upon those to whom it has been committed by God.

"We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one" (2 Cor. 7:2). "I will not be a burden" (2 Cor. 12:14). "For neither were we found at any time with flattering speech, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness; God is witness" (1 Thes. 2:5). "Nor did we eat bread as a gift from anyone, but in labor and hardship we worked night and day so that we would not be burdensome to any of you" (2 Thes. 3:8). From these passages we see clearly the attitude of the apostle. He was not willing to impose any burden upon others or in any way to take advantage of them. And this must be our attitude too. Not only should we receive no salary, we should be careful not to take the

slightest advantage of any of our brethren. Apostles should be willing to be taken advantage of, but on no account should they ever take advantage of others. It is a shameful thing to profess trust in God and yet play the role of a pauper, disclosing one's needs and provoking others to pity. A servant of God who really sees the glory of God, and his own glorious position as one of His workmen, can well afford to be independent of others, and even liberal. It is only right for us to enjoy the hospitality of our brethren for awhile, but we should most rigidly guard against taking advantage of them in trifles such as a night's lodging, an odd meal, or the use of light and coal, or of household utensils, or even of a daily paper. Nothing reveals smallness of character so readily as taking petty advantages. If we are not careful in such matters, we may as well relinquish our task.

All the movements of workers vitally affect the work, and unless we have a living trust in God, our movements are liable to be determined by prospective incomes. Money has great power to influence men, and unless we have true faith in God and a true heart to do His will, we are likely to be influenced by the rise and fall of funds. If our movements are governed by financial supplies, then we are hirelings working for pay, or beggars seeking alms, and we are a disgrace to the name of the Lord. We should never go to a place because of the bright financial prospects of working there, nor should we refrain from going because the financial outlook is dark. In all our movements we must ask ourselves, Am I in the will of God? or am I influenced at all by financial considerations? We are out to serve the Lord, not to make a living.

THE WORKERS AND THEIR WORK

Let us be clear that we must not only bear the burden of our own personal needs, but of the needs of the work as well. If God has called us to a certain work, then all financial outlay connected with it is our affair. Wherever we go, we are responsible for all expenses relating to it, from its inception to its close. If we are called of God to do pioneering work, though the expenses of rent, furniture, and traveling, may amount to a goodly sum, we alone are responsible for them. He is not worthy to be called God's servant who cannot be responsible for his own needs and the needs of the work to which God has called him. Not the local church, but the one to whom the work has been committed, must bear all financial burdens connected with it.

Another point to which we must give attention is a clear discrimination between gifts intended for personal use and gifts given for the work. It may seem superfluous to mention it, and yet it needs emphasis, that no money given for the work should be used by the worker to meet his personal needs. It must either be used to defray expenses in connection with his own work, or be sent on to another worker. We must learn righteousness in relation to all money matters. If there is any lack in connection with the work, the worker must bear the burden, and if there is any surplus, he cannot divert it to the meeting of his own requirements.

When I had just begun to serve the Lord, I read an incident in Hudson Taylor's life which was a great help to me. If I remember it correctly, this is the gist of it: Mr. Taylor was in St. Louis, U.S.A., and was due in Springfield for meetings. The carriage taking him to the station was delayed, with the result that when he arrived there the train had already left, and there seemed no possible way for him to keep his appointment. But, turning to Dr. J. H. Brookes, he said, "My Father runs the trains; I'll be there in time." Upon inquiry of the agent, they found a train leaving St. Louis in another direction, which crossed the line going to Springfield; but the train on the other line always left ten minutes before this train arrived, as they were opposing roads. Without a moment's hesitation, Mr. Taylor said he would go that way, in spite of the fact that the agent told him they never made connections there. While they waited, a gentleman came to

the station and handed Mr. Taylor some money. He turned to Dr. Brookes with the remark, "Do you not see that my Father has just sent me my train fare!" meaning that, even had he arrived in time for the other train, he could not have taken it. Dr. Brookes was amazed.

He knew Mr. Taylor had quite a good sum of money in hand, which had been given him for his work in China, so he asked, "What do you mean by saying you had no money for your fare?" Mr. Taylor replied, "I never use anything for personal expenses that is specified for the work. The money earmarked for my own use has just come in!" For almost the first time in the history of that road the St. Louis train arrived ahead of the other, and Mr. Taylor was able to keep his appointment at Springfield!

MAKING OUR NEEDS KNOWN

As we have already said, an apostle may encourage God's people to remember the needs of the saints and of the elders, but he can mention nothing of his own needs or the needs of the work. Let him only draw the attention of the churches to the wants of others, and God will draw their attention to his wants. Let him be concerned about the needs of the saints and elders, and God will use the saints and elders to draw the attention of the churches to his needs.

We must avoid all propaganda in connection with the work. With utter honesty of heart we must trust in God and make our requirements known to Him alone. Should the Lord so lead, we may tell to His glory what He has wrought through us. (See Acts 14:27; 15:3-4.) But nothing must be done by way of advertisement, in the hope of receiving material help. This is displeasing to God and hurtful to ourselves. If in any financial matter our faith grows weak, we shall find it fail when difficulties arising in connection with the work put it to the test. Besides, if we know anything of the power of the cross to deal with the self-life, how can we resort to propaganda for our work and so take things out of the hands of God and carry them on by our own efforts?

I know of works which, at their inception, were on a pure faith basis, and the blessing of the Lord rested on them. Soon the workers felt the need of extending the work, and actually extended it beyond their usual income. Consequently, they had to resort to indirect advertisement in order to meet their liabilities. Let us beware of extending the work ourselves, for if the extension is of man, we shall have to use man-made methods to meet the new demands. If God sees the work needs extension, He Himself will extend it, and if He extends it, He will be responsible to meet the increased needs. It is because human methods are employed to extend a work, that human means must be devised to meet its fresh requirements; so advertisement and propaganda are resorted to in order to solve the problem. Circular letters, reports, magazines, deputation-work, special agents, and special business centers have been means much used of Christian workers to increase funds for the work. Men are not willing to let God extend it in His own time, and because they cannot wait patiently for its spontaneous development, but force an artificial growth, they have to resort to natural activity to meet the demands of that growth. They have hastened developments, so they have to devise ways and means of procuring increased supplies. The spontaneous growth of the work of God does not necessitate any activities of human nature, for God meets all demands which He creates.

Advertisement has been developed to a fine art in this age, but if we have to take our cue from businessmen and use up-to-date advertising methods to make our work a success, then let us give up our ministry and change our calling. The wisdom of the world declares that "the end justifies the means," but it is never so in the spiritual realm. Our end must be spiritual, but our means must be spiritual too. The cross

is no mere symbol; it is a fact and a principle which must govern all God's work.

We must let the Holy Spirit hinder us where He will, and not seek to urge things forward by touching divine work with human hands. There is no need for us to devise means to draw attention to our work. God in His sovereignty and providence can well bear all responsibility. If He moves men to help us, then all is well, but if we seek to move men ourselves, both we and the work will suffer loss. If we truly believe God we shall leave the matter wholly in His hands.

We are all trusting God for our living, but what need is there to make it known? I feel repelled when I hear God's servants emphasize the fact that they are living by faith. Do we really believe in God's sovereignty and in His providence? If we do, surely we can trust Him to make our needs known to His saints, and so to order things that our needs can be met without our trying to make them known. Even should people conclude from our manner of living that we have a private income, and in consequence withhold their gifts, we do not mind. I would counsel my younger brethren in the ministry not to talk of their personal needs, or of their faith in God, so that they may the better be able to prove Him. The more faith there is, the less talk there will be about it.

AMONG THE FELLOW WORKERS

In the Old Testament we read that though the Levites stood in the place of God to receive tithes from all His people, they themselves offered tithes to Him. The servant of the Lord should learn to give as well as to receive. We praise God for the generous way the workers in days past have given to their fellow laborers, but we still need to be more thoughtful for the material needs of all our brethren in the work. We must remember the words of Paul: "These hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me" (Acts 20:34). We must not merely hope to have sufficient to spend on ourselves and our work, but must look to God to provide us with sufficient to give to others too. If we are only occupied with the thought of our personal needs and the needs of our work, and forget the needs of our fellow workers, the plane of our spiritual life is too low. Like Paul, we must constantly think of those with us, and help to minister to their needs. If anyone among us is only a receiver and not a giver, he is unworthy of Him who sent him and those who labor with him.

The scope of our thinking along the line of material needs should always be on the basis of "my needs and to those who are with me." The money God sends to me is not only for me, but also for those with me. A brother once suggested that God would surely supply the needs of all our fellow workers, so we need not feel too concerned about them, especially as we are not a mission and have no financial obligations towards them. But our brother forgot that we are not only responsible for our own needs and the needs of our work, but in a spiritual way we, like Paul, are responsible also for those with us. Whether we are good fellow workers or not will be evidenced by the measure of our thoughtfulness for our brethren in the work.

Since we are not a mission, and have no man-made organization, no headquarters, no centralization of funds, and consequently no distributing center, how can the needs of all our fellow workers be supplied? This question has been repeatedly put to me by interested brethren. The answer is this: all needs will be met if each one realizes his threefold financial responsibility--first, in regard to his personal family and needs; second, in regard to the needs of his work; and third, in regard to the needs of his fellow laborers. We must not only look to God to supply our own wants and all those related to our work, but we must look to Him just as definitely to send us extra funds to enable us to have something to send to our associates in the work. Of course we have no official obligation towards them, but we cannot ignore our spiritual

responsibility.

The requirements of workers vary, and the requirements of the work vary too, besides which, the power of prayer differs in different individuals, and the measure of faith differs also. It follows therefore that our income will not be the same; but every one of us should definitely exercise faith for the supply of sufficient funds to be able to distribute to the necessities of others. The amounts we receive and give may differ, but the same principle applies to us all. Working on such a basis, no headquarters is necessary; for each of us acts as a sort of headquarters and distributing center. Of course that does not mean we must send an equal share to all who are associated with us; that is a matter of individual guidance. We trust in the sovereignty and providence of God, and we leave it to Him to regulate the passing on of gifts so that none will have a surplus and none be left in want. Should God lead us to send money regularly to any particular worker, it would be well to send it through one brother this time and another next time, so that the giver will receive less attention from the receiver.

The principle of God's government in relation to financial things is "he who gathered much had no excess, and he who gathered little had no lack" (2 Cor. 8:15). Anyone who has gathered much must be willing to have nothing over, for only then can he who has gathered little have no lack. Some of us have proved in experience that when we bear the burden for those who gather little, God sees to it that we gather much; but if we only think of our own needs, the utmost we can hope for is to gather little and have no lack. It is a privilege to be able to help your brethren in the work, and to be able to give away even the greater proportion of your income. Those who have only learned to take seldom receive; but those who have learned to give are always receiving and have always more to give. The more money you spend on others, the more your income will increase; the more you try to save, the more you will be troubled by rust and thieves (Matt. 6:19-20).

We must not confine our giving to those immediately associated with us, but must remember workers in other parts and seek to minister to their needs. We must constantly keep the thought of other workers and their needs before the brethren among whom we labor, and encourage them to help them, never fearing that God will bless other workers more than us.

We must leave no room for fear or jealousy. Do we really believe in the sovereignty of God? If so, we shall never fear that anything God has intended for us shall fail to reach us. The needs of Paul and his fellow workers were great, and though he only brought the needs of the saints and the elders before the churches, God looked after his needs and the needs of those with him.

If your work is to be conducted along lines well-pleasing to God, then it is absolutely essential that the sovereignty of God be a working factor in your experience, and no mere theory. When you know His sovereignty, then even if men seem to move around you at random and circumstances appear to whirl at the mercy of chance, you will still be confident in the assurance that God is ordering every detail of your way for His glory and for your good. The needs of others may be known to men, while none may know or even care about your wants, but you will have no anxiety if the sovereignty of God is a reality to you; for then you will see all those haphazard circumstances, and all those indifferent folk, and even the opposing hosts of evil, being silently harnessed to His will; and all those unrelated forces will become related as one to serve His purpose, and to serve the purposes of those whose will is one with His. Yes, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

So the question is not, Are our needs small or great? or, Are they known or unknown? but simply this, Are we in the will of God? Our faith may be tested, and our patience too, but if we are willing to leave things in God's hands and quietly wait for Him, then we shall not fail to see a careful timing of events and an exquisite dovetailing of circumstances, and emerging from a meaningless maze we shall behold a perfect correspondence between our need and the supply.

WHY NOT A FAITH MISSION?

Some have asked, "Since you believe all God's servants should trust Him for their daily needs, and since you have quite a company of fellow workers, why do you not become an organized faith mission?"

For two reasons: first, in God's Word all association of workers is on a spiritual basis, not on an official one. As soon as you have an official organization, then you change the spiritual relationship which exists among the fellow workers into an official relationship. Second, dependence upon God alone for the meeting of all material needs does not demand as active a faith on the part of an official organization as it does on the part of individuals who are only related in a spiritual fellowship. It is much easier to trust God as a mission than to trust Him as an individual. In Scripture we see individual faith, but we see no such thing as organization-faith. In an organization there is bound to be some income, and every member is sure to receive a share, whether he exercises faith or not. This opens the way for people to join the mission who have no active faith in God. And in the case of those who have faith when they join, there is the likelihood of personal trust in the Lord gradually growing weak through lack of exercise, since supplies come with a certain measure of regularity whether the individual members of the mission exercise faith or not. It is very easy to lose faith in God and simply trust an organization. Those who know the frailty of the flesh realize how prone we are to depend on anything and anyone but God.

It is much easier to put our expectation in remittances from the mission than in ravens from heaven. Beloved, is not this the truth? If I have said anything amiss, may God and men both forgive me.

Because of our proneness to look at the bucket and forget the fountain, God has frequently to change His means of supply to keep our eyes fixed on the source. So the heavens that once sent us welcome showers become as brass, the streams that refreshed us are allowed to dry up, and the ravens that brought our daily food visit us no longer; but then God surprises us by meeting our needs through a poor widow, and so we prove the marvelous resources of God. Organization-faith does not stimulate personal trust in God, and that is what He is out to develop.

I know that in an organized body many difficulties vanish automatically. Humanly speaking, it insures a much greater income, for many of God's children prefer to give to organizations rather than to individuals. Besides, organized work comes much more to the notice of the children of God than unorganized. But questions such as these challenge us continually: Do you really believe in God? Must scriptural principles be sacrificed to convenience? Do you really want God's best with all its accompanying difficulties? We do, and so we have no alternative but to work on the ground of the Body of Christ in spiritual association with all others who stand on that same ground.

But we wish to point out that, though we ourselves are not a mission, we are not opposed to missions. Our testimony is positive, not negative. We believe that in God's Word the different groups of sent-out ones who were associated in the work all stood on the ground of the Body, and that no such group was organized into a mission. Still, if our brethren feel led of God to form such an organization, we have nothing to say against it. We only say, God bless them! For us to form a mission because others of God's

children do so would be wrong, since we see no scriptural ground for it, and have no leading of the Spirit in that direction. But whether we work in a fellowship whose relationships are only spiritual, or in an organization whose relationships are official, may God make us absolutely one in this, that we do not seek the increase or extension of the companies in which we work, but make it our one aim to work exclusively for the founding and building up of the local churches.

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